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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002168

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [SNAR](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: PRESIDENT OBASANJO CONVENES MEETING ON NARCOTICS

REF: ABUJA 002020

Classified By: Charge Thomas P. Furey for Reasons 1.5(b), (d)

1. Summary: President Obasanjo convened a meeting November 9 to continue the discussion on Nigeria,s record on fighting narcotics trafficking. The Chairman of the NDLEA, Dr. Bello, gave an impassioned presentation refuting American and British allegations of poor performance that was weak on substance. The President gave no indication that he thought Dr. Bello had succeeded in refuting the allegations and he thanked the Americans and British for &raising the alarm.8 President Obasanjo has received the message and appears to understand the gravity of the situation. Whether or not any action flows from this, the Nigerians will not be able to say that they were not warned if Nigeria does not get recertified six months from now. End Summary.

2. Following up on the October 20 President Obasanjo had with Ambassador Campbell and the British High Commissioner, the President convened a meeting of his law enforcement officials November 9 to discuss further Nigeria,s record on narcotics interdiction. The British High Commissioner and I were invited to participate. The President opened by asking the Chairman of the Nigeria Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), Dr. Bello Lafiaji, to respond to the &serious allegations8 of poor performance by his agency that have been made by the Americans and British officials.

3. Dr. Bello had prepared a power point presentation that was long on graphics and short on substance. At one point President Obasanjo somewhat irritably told Dr. Bello to move it along. Dr. Bello cited statistics showing the number of people who had been arrested and prosecuted over the last several years and the amount of drugs seized, but he never addressed one of our main criticisms: the fact that the arrests have been of low-level couriers and not of any drug kingpins and that the drug shipments seized have been small shipment and not any of the large, significant ones. Although Dr. Bello stated as a fact that major traffickers have been arrested and large shipments have been seized, he did not cite any specific evidence that would support those claims.

4. Dr. Bello,s presentation was impassioned. At several points he spoke quite loudly to emphasize his points. He ended by noting that the NDLEA works closely with DEA Lagos and with the British drug enforcement officials and that the relationship needed to be based on mutual trust. His tone was one of someone who was hurt by the &unfair allegations.8

5. President Obasanjo then turned to the British High Commissioner and me. The High Commissioner noted that there was no new evidence here to refute the allegations that we had made, that the amount of narcotics entering the UK and the U.S. from Nigeria continues to grow, and that there was irrefutable evidence that NDLEA officials had fabricated evidence to support a Nigerian drug kingpin, Dr. Gabriel Solomons, who had been convicted in the UK. He noted that a major trafficker had been arrested in Lagos after the American and British officials complained last month but that there has been no publicity about this arrest and it was unclear whether the authorities would vigorously pursue prosecution. I noted that the reason we were raising these issues now was that Nigeria would be coming up for recertification in approximately six months and there are many people in Washington who are questioning whether Nigeria should be recertified, given their track record in recent years. A denial of recertification for Nigeria would have grave implications for the bilateral relationship, including a significant reduction in our aid program.

6. The President thanked the Americans and British for &raising the alarm8 and said that Nigeria, the U.S., and the UK are all working for the same objective of fighting narcotics trafficking. He turned to Dr. Bello and, in a tone that was somewhat lecturing, told him that he &should not take anything for granted.8 He said there needed to be greater communications flows in both directions and all information had to be investigated. He ended the meeting by stating that the &relationship should be smooth8 and the concerns raised by the U.S. and the UK should not be viewed as an indictment of NDLEA but rather as a call for greater cooperation.

17. Comment: Clearly President Obasanjo is seized with the issue of Nigeria,s record on narcotics interdiction. He did not at any point in the meeting indicate that he thought that Dr. Bello had successfully refuted the allegations we have raised. He also did not indicate in any way that he thought the allegations were unfounded. His role during the meeting was more that of a facilitator who was trying to bring two sides together. It remains to be seen where the NDLEA goes from here, but if Nigeria does face a loss of certification they will not be able to say that they were not warned.

FUREY